

Vietnam Memories Help Vt. Vet Teach A New Generation

Student Becomes Instructor At UVM

"The general of a large army may be defeated, but you cannot defeat the determined mind of a peasant."

— Confucius (551-478 B.C.)

By WILL LINDNER
Free-Lance Writer

In 1969 Larry Boynton was in Vietnam, developing an eagle eye in his single-minded effort to stay alive.

Boynton was a door gunner on a U.S. Air Force combat helicopter. His survival depended on the ability to spot the slightest movement in the tree-tops just 20 feet below him, to pick up the flash of a muzzle in the sunlight that could betray a Viet Cong guerrilla preparing to shoot him out of the sky. He trained himself to detect telltale contrasts in the thick foliage of the triple-canopy jungle forests from his open helicopter door, and, at night in camp, sharpened his hearing to listen for the stealthy footfalls of a VC bent on deadly sabotage.

He was 24 years old.

He is 47 now, a trim, bearded man who goes around in jeans and high-laced Georgia brand boots. He sports wide belts with buckles that tell something of his story; one silver buckle bears the words "Vietnam Veteran"; another, of brass, is in the shape of a military helicopter. Tattoos peek from beneath the cuffs of his long-sleeved shirts.

Larry Boynton, now a resident of Lyndonville, carries the Vietnam War with him each day on his shoulders. He is steeped in it, shaped by it.

But Boynton now has come out to meet the war, not just on its terms — the daily exposure to danger and death he endured for two years and has endured in his memory the 23 years since — but on his own. Boynton has bent his



Photo By Sandy Macys

Larry Boynton holds Stanley Karnow's "Vietnam: A History," a book he uses at the University of Vermont to teach about the Vietnam War.

students know nothing about it," Boynton said recently, discussing the course in a room he rents near the UVM campus while his wife and daughter await his weekend visits to Lyndonville.

"Another thing the students have told me is they know Vietnam veterans, but the veterans themselves will not talk about Vietnam, which is characteristic of the reaction we had when we came back. Nobody wanted to talk about the war. People wanted to forget it. People said it was a mistake, it was a bad thing.

"And so what I think I'm doing

"...I'm trying to fill a need, which I feel is of benefit to the students from a personal, or educational, or even an emotional level. What was Vietnam? What happened there? Why has it fallen into the black hole of history?"

— Larry Boynton

emotion and intellect in the challenge to fully understand the war, historically, socially and personally, and to teach a new generation of Vermont college students just what happened to their country in the war years of the 1950s, '60s, and '70s.

An auto mechanic and former automotive vocational instructor at the high school level, Boynton the Vietnam veteran became a voracious reader of historical accounts of Southeast Asia and analyses of the French and American wars there while he was recuperating from an operation in 1985. He has now parlayed that interest into pursuit of a master's degree in history at the University of Vermont in Burlington, where his singular combination of personal experience, acumen as a student, and interpersonal skills caught the eye of History Department administrators.

Boynton was asked, and agreed, to teach a course through UVM's Division of Continuing Education — the university's first course specifically on the Vietnam War, the war the United States lost.

For the 83 or so students who have enrolled in his course — nearly 60 in the current semester that runs into May — the course is a unique experience. It is, in a sense, a disgorging of a terrible lump in America's throat, this speaking about what has been often been unspeakable since the U.S. chalked up its losses and quit South Vietnam in haste in 1973.

The majority of the students have parents or aunts and uncles who grew up during the late '50s and throughout the '60s, who might mention Vietnam. But the

is, I'm trying to fill a need, which I feel is of benefit to the students from a personal, or educational, or even an emotional level. What was Vietnam? What happened there? Why has it fallen into the black hole of history?"

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Larry Boynton ventured into the black hole of Vietnam in August 1967. Born in Somerville, Mass., and raised in Massachusetts and Maine, Boynton tinkered with post-secondary education but, looking back, he said, "I just decided that school wasn't for me at that time."

So he joined the Air Force in 1966 and went to Denver to study aircraft weapons systems. There he got acquainted with the Gatling guns made in Burlington by the General Electric Co. It was his first contact with the GE military technology that was to be so much a part of his life for the next three years that company field reps would visit him in Vietnam to discuss the intricacies of their weapons and curry his favor.

(Boynton still has a few of the company's calling cards, fashioned after the notorious cards of the character, Paladin, in TV's famous western, "Have Gun, Will Travel." Those fictional cards read, "Wire Paladin, San Francisco." GE's cards, under a line drawing of an M-61 20mm Vulcan, read: "Fastest Gun; Wire General Electric — Burlington.")

In his first tour of duty in Vietnam, Boynton served in relatively secure areas in the Mekong Delta south of Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) and in the central highlands north of that city. He was a weapons specialist, operating a variety of GE products like the miniguns mounted two-in-each-doorway in

See Page 4: Veteran

Veteran

(Continued from Page One) American "Huey" assault helicopters, and writing evaluative reports on the guns. He saw action in the 1968 Tet offensive, the surprise attack on the American embassy in Saigon which rattled America's confidence that the pro-communist forces of Vietnam could be easily subdued by the mighty U.S. forces.

His second tour of duty began in April 1969, following several months of stateside training.

"I went back to Vietnam for another year of fun in the sun," Boynton quipped.

His second year, however, was rougher, more intense. He saw duty in what would later be known as "the secret war" across the border in Cambodia, stealthily delivering special forces teams to gather information on infiltration from North Vietnam, then flying back days later to evacuate them, sometimes under heavy fire. Boynton also became an instructor and flight examiner, responsible for judging and certifying new helicopter gunners.

"And I rejected some because I felt as though they didn't have a combat mentality," he said. "A combat mentality to me meant to be extremely alert sitting in the door of the helicopter behind your weapons, having the ability to shoot without second thoughts." You and your crewmates' lives depended on such reflexes and conviction, Boynton said.

Larry Boynton left Vietnam for the final time in April 1970. He had accomplished his goals, and primarily, he had survived the test of fate and skills the war had imposed upon him (and which he had imposed upon himself by re-upping). And — what with combat pay, flight pay, overseas pay, and the per diem granted those who fought in forward positions in the Asian jungle — he had saved enough money to buy a shiny Harley Davidson motorcycle and a hot new car.

That's what he had set out to do.

"There was no patriotism involved," Boynton recalled. "It was strictly the money, strictly the adventure. There is something to be said about walking that razor's edge between existence and eternity."

"I'm not saying I was a mercenary, but...my attitude was survival. I wanted to stay alive, just like everybody else that was in 'Nam."

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But Larry Boynton, as with so many Vietnam veterans, found it impossible to put the war behind him.

"I never came home, because home had changed," Boynton said. "I just came back. It was a very strange experience. People would just say, 'You're home; it's all over; forget about it.'"

"Well, there was no forgetting Vietnam."

Boynton remembers himself for several years as being "emotionally numb," alienated from mainstream American society, superficial in his relationships with others. He took a job as a mechanic in Andover, Mass., and eventually married in 1972.

But the Vietnam War clung to him, like a scent, or like a bundle strapped to his back. Like other veterans, his sense of isolation lifted somewhat in 1982 when the Vietnam Veterans Memorial — "the Wall," the black granite Vietnam memorial in Washington, D.C. — was dedicated in 1982 and the country finally expressed its recognition of the sacrifices its soldiers had made. Mostly, though, he labored in the automotive trade and lived with near-daily thoughts of the war.

Then, in 1985, Boynton had surgery to remove his gall bladder, and during his recuperation he purchased a copy of Stanley Karnow's "Vietnam: A History." He devoured the book, and its bibliography spurred him to further and further reading. A door had opened for the former door gunner, and he eagerly went through.

"I had known nothing about the country, the people, the commitment the U.S. had made to Vietnam, why this had come about," he said. "After 15 years, I wanted to know something about Vietnam, just to try to put my own experience into some kind of historical perspective."

Boynton was off on a quest, a life change on several levels. It was part career change, graduating from the vocational to the academic, and partly an intellectual challenge for the college dropout.

But in a sense, Boynton also had come to realize that he had missed the boat when he was in Vietnam, even though he had been in the thick of the action.

"I was looking for an understanding of what was going on (during the war years) at a level beyond my comprehension at that time," Boynton said. "I experienced the war in isolation of what was going on at the policy level in Washington and Saigon...and the social changes that were happening in this country because of the war."

Boynton accumulated a veritable library on Indochina, and ingested it in depth. By this time he was living in Lyndonville, and eventually, as he took part in what limited public discussion there was of America's longest war, he bubbled to the surface as an articulate, insightful voice of experience. He was invited to speak at UVM and Johnson State College.

Finally, his academic appetite whetted, the mechanic and automotive instructor abandoned his tools and departed for Burlington in pursuit of an M.A. degree — with a



Photo By Sandy Macys

With a map of Southeast Asia spread out in front of him, Larry Boynton discusses how his experiences in Vietnam shaped his approach to teaching about the war there.

special interest in the influence of technology on military history and strategy.

terest in other states — notably California — but Hutton said this was a new offering for the University of Vermont.

There he caught the eye of some of the university's more traditionally trained historians, who recognized he was set apart by his experience, richly flavored by a passionate personal and intellectual quest.

"I was impressed with Larry, as I sometimes am with students who are adults," said UVM's Patrick Hutton, acting chairman of the university's history department. "They usually come with lots of enthusiasm and a world of experience. His was especially interesting, with his strong sense of identification as a Vietnam veteran."

Hutton and Boynton conceived the idea of the course, titled History 96, The Vietnam War.

"We're now a generation away from the war experience," said Hutton, an apt time to help students of all ages put the bitter war into historical context. College courses focusing on the war had attracted in-

dhist monks on Saigon's streets in the early 1960s. To visit Boynton's classroom, for those of an age to remember, is to relive the deepening war: the grim statistics of death and the accumulation of body bags, the angry division of this country's citizens over the war, the downfall of the Johnson presidency, and the interminable dragging-on of a conflict everyone grew to hate but no one seemed to know how to end.

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On a recent Monday night, Boynton's students paused during his lecture to discuss their unique academic course. Several expressed an interest in uncovering a subject long silenced, if not officially, by tacit agreement in American society.

"This class offers our generation a way to talk about Vietnam," said a young man. The war in which some 58,000 American soldiers had died hadn't made the history books he had seen in high school, "except maybe a couple pictures of helicopters, if we got that far."

Four students said they had close relatives who had fought in the war. "But my dad doesn't volunteer anything," said one, nor are there the typical soldier's mementos around the house. "I guess he doesn't have too good a feeling about the war."

A young lady said her uncle had fought in Vietnam and, being artistic, painted his memories and impressions. The canvases were grotesque, depicting victims of the war's terrible instruments, such as napalm and agent orange.

"The only way we discuss it (Vietnam) is when we try to win it all over again," said another student, referring to the 1991 Persian Gulf War and its supposed vanquishing of America's "Vietnam syndrome."

Two who had lived through the turmoil were there to reconsider it. A woman who said she was in high school during the Vietnam years recalled that "there were so many different versions of what was going on in the '60s and '70s. The right-wing government was telling us one thing and the left-wing press was telling us another." She said she had protested the war at the time, but now sought to learn the truth and re-evaluate, if necessary.

"I was a World War II vet," said a man with gray hair. "I had two sons at or near draft age," and, though a veteran of "the good war," he found the growing conflict in Southeast Asia "scary." But he admired the role a free press played in making Americans aware of what was happening, and he worried because the press was barred by the military from similarly reporting the Persian Gulf War.

Two students said the country

had learned valuable lessons from the war. One spoke of the "incredible mismanagement" of the war by the American political and military establishment, who had misunderstood the commitment and motivation of the Vietnamese. If we had stressed the political reforms that were necessary in Vietnam more than a military solution, he said, the outcome might have been different.

And another young man said the deceit and evasion practiced for years by our presidents and generals had taught Americans a valuable lesson. "Question authority," he said, and added (from a '90s perspective), "Relax a little bit and let it slide."

For Larry Boynton, to whom the bullets were real in Vietnam, the lessons begin with a maxim thousands of years old: "Before you go into a war know yourself and know your enemy, and you will win 100 victories." So said Sun Tzu, a Chinese military tactician who lived 400 years before Christ.

That wisdom went unheeded by the American government, which was fighting to stymie communism while the "enemy" was engaged in a thoroughly different cause.

"The Vietnamese saw this as a war of national liberation," he said, "a means of freeing themselves from a colonial power. The Vietnamese saw very little difference between the French and the Americans. ... They saw the Americans as simply replacing the French."

And while the U.S. commitment, though steep, was limited, "the Vietnamese approached the war as a total war, with total mobilization of their society, because they were fighting for an objective they had never lost sight of since 1945 — and that was a free, united and independent Vietnam."

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But it wasn't Larry Boynton, the historian, who fought in Vietnam 25 years ago. It was a younger man, seeking adventure, saving money for a Harley, blithely answering his country's call. And that Larry Boynton survives, too, represented by the belt buckles and tattoos, the memories and the jungle programming of his senses and reflexes that have endured into middle age.

"Knowing what I know now, I would certainly not volunteer to go to Vietnam," he said.

But he wears his accoutrements and experiences as a badge of honor.

"The sacrifices we made are not to be diminished because of the conduct of the war, or the outcome or repercussions of the war. It's my way of saying I was there, I made the sacrifice."

"Honor the warrior," he said, "not the war."



CHAFFEE collage

Occasional Newsletter of The Chaffee Art Center Rutland, Vermont

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Reflections on the Wall

Greg Barsanti

Nearly 40,000 people converged on Rutland's Main Street Park for 12 days in September to visit the 250-foot long exact replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C..

The opening ceremony on September 6th featured U.S. Senator James Jeffords, Rutland Mayor Jeffrey Wennberg, and Jake Jacobsen, the personal representative of Major General Donald Edwards of the Vermont National Guard.



Patrick Farrow Photo

Throughout the exhibition, volunteers were on duty around the clock, helping visitors locate the names of veterans either killed or missing in action, and answering questions about this remarkable exhibit.

The Gallery mounted an intriguing show of art and artifacts from the Vietnam conflict as well as photographs and dioramas depicting a veteran's personal experiences in the war.

An emotionally-charged closing ceremony included WSYB disc jockey, Bob Bascom, who played popular music of the Vietnam era. Jake Jacobsen called upon all veterans to face the Wall and salute their 58,175 fallen comrades. He then invited people to come to the microphone to share their feelings about the war and the Moving Wall. Finally, Susan Farrow presented Chapter 1 of the Vietnam Veterans of America with the original drawing by J. Campbell Design which was used for the show's promotional materials.

Donations are still being accepted to support the Moving Wall, and a striking T-shirt is on sale in the Chaffee's Gallery Shop.

Lessons from the Vietnam War

Jan Barsanti, Education Committee

To help reinforce the experience of visiting the Moving Wall, the Chaffee's Education Committee coordinated an educational outreach program and a series of public forums, both of which have received extremely positive feedback.

The committee distributed 450 kits for teachers containing a variety of materials on the Vietnam War—timelines, maps, bibliographies and a resource list of speakers—to elementary and secondary schools in Vermont and bordering New Hampshire.

Three well-attended public forums were moderated by Robert Rummel, Dean of Students at Castleton, and presented at the Rutland Armory. Vaughn Altemus of the University of Vermont set the stage at the first forum on Historical Perspectives by recounting how the U.S. became involved in Southeast Asia. Roger Krantz of Norwich University, shared his experiences working with refugees for the Agency of International Development. Bob Warren of Johnson State discussed his visit to Vietnam with the U.S. Indochina Project in 1988.

An emotionally riveting forum on Personal Perspectives included Bill Anderson, Greg Barsanti, Peter Cosgrove, Maureen Dwyer, Jake Jacobsen, Spencer Putnam, Mary Trombley and Mark Truhan. The group reflected six veterans, one veteran who was active in the anti-war movement, and two who performed alternative service for political reasons.

The climax of the series, Legacies of Vietnam included Peter Martin, Executive Vice President of WCAX-TV who shared his experiences as a journalist and military advisor in Vietnam and Desert Storm; John Foster, a retired foreign service officer who served in Vietnam who offered political lessons of the conflict; and Dr. Matthew Friedman, Executive Director of the National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder on research and breakthroughs in this emerging field.

It was exciting to be involved in a project which touched so many lives in so many ways. Special thanks go to those who helped develop the educational component of the show: Greg Barsanti, Barbara Carris, Susan Farrow, Patrick Farrow, Robert Rummel, Karen Seward, Jake Jacobsen, Mark Truhan, Thomas Donahue and Castleton State College.

From the President

Having served as President of the Chaffee Board over the last three years, it would be practically impossible to choose an event or art show of which I have been the most proud.

The traveling Vietnam Veterans Memorial, however, brought pride and involvement to the community as well as to the Chaffee.

If one of the main purposes of a piece of art is to make people feel something about what they are looking at—to move them, so to speak—the Wall certainly did that. It was a time to remember, a time to heal and a time to say final good-byes to friends and relatives.

In the two weeks the Wall was here, I came to know a whole new circle of people—the Vets—and came to love them all. My special thanks to these unique and wonderful people who watched over the Wall, cared for it during its stay, and provided support and information to many thousands of visitors.

I also feel a great sense of pride in our Board of Trustees who gave their time freely and generously: Jan and Greg Barsanti, who together contributed greatly to the success of

the event; Patrick Farrow who has never ever turned his back on the Chaffee when help was needed; Karen Seward, who donated hundreds of yogurts to sustain our volunteers; and Sally Keefe who brought hot soup on cold nights to the Vets. I could go on and on. Thank you all.

A special thanks to Susan Farrow, the Chaffee's Executive Director. A deep sense of gratitude and affection for the way she performs her job with such skill and sensitivity to people.

As for the rest of the staff, Terry, Lorraine, Jeanne and Ruth, they gave their all, as usual, and made everything seem to come together effortlessly.

Finally, I'd like to thank Bob Rummel of Castleton State College for all his help, and Jake, Mark, Gene, Donny to you all. Thanks guys. I miss you.

Barbara T. Carris

Barbara T. Carris
President of the Board

Vietnam Memorial

On Sept. 6, formal ceremonies were held in Main Street Park dedicating the arrival of the "Traveling Wall" Vietnam Veterans Memorial.


Dozens of individuals and organizations were responsible for this event but I thought special notice should be made for the efforts of the Chaffee Art Center, who sponsored the memorial and a series of lectures and related events concerning the Vietnam War era. Susan Farrow, the Chaffee's director, was instrumental in this two-year effort.

Thanks also to Sen. Jim Jeffords for his efforts, and to Community Development Director Tom Donahue, who represented the city throughout the planning process. Thanks also to the Recreation Department for accommodating the memorial and to the Department of Public Works for the curb cuts to make the park fully accessible to the disabled.

During the proceedings, American Legion Post 31 presented to the city a very large American flag "in recognition of everything the city has done in support of Vietnam veterans." This flag now flies at Main Street Park, and on behalf of the people of Rutland, I want to extend my deep appreciation for this special gift.

Finally, many thanks to all the Rutland area veterans for their financial organizational and emotional support. Without them, Rutland would not have received the honor of being the first Vermont community to host this memorial.

JEFFREY WENNERBERG
(Mayor)
Rutland



Visitors at the Vietnam Memorial War in Washington, D.C. A half-scale replica of the Wall will be on display in Main Street Park in Rutland through Sept. 18 and many special activities are planned to coincide with its visit.

File Photo

Moving Vietnam Memorial Wall Comes to Rutland

By ED BARNA

When Rutland Vietnam veteran Jake Jacobsen first visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., he knew exactly how he wanted to do it.

The 500-foot-long black granite monument, 10 feet high at the center of a V-shaped walkway cut into the ground, is to one side of a reflecting pool between the Washington Memorial and the Lincoln Memorial. Jacobsen had made up his mind that he would walk halfway down from the Washington Memorial, turn to the right, and walk across a slight rise to the Wall.

"As I came across that rise, literally my heart started to pound," Jacobsen said. "The closer I got to the Wall, the harder my heart was pounding."

"When I got close enough to read a name, the Wall sucked me right in, because my reflection was there," Jacobsen said. "You can't read a name without seeing yourself in the Wall."

There were 13 names of per-

sonal friends on the Wall, and the name of Jacobsen's commander. "It became like a spiritual experience," he said.

"When I saw my commander's name, I dropped to my knees and wept, because the man was like my military father, we were tight," Jacobsen said. "As soon as that happened, a tremendous healing came."

"I could put my commander and friends in a place of honor, the Wall of Honor," Jacobsen said. "Emotionally, I was ripped open, but I was also healed."

"I saw that a thousand times a day, wounds being opened up and people being healed," Jacobsen said. "If just a small touch of that can happen in Rutland, it would be enormous."

It's been two years since the Chaffee Art Center asked to have John Devitt's half-scale, free-standing, aluminum replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial come to Rutland. If the response is anything like that in Gardner, Mass., where the Moving Wall

brought in tens of thousands of people and galvanized the veterans' community during its two-week stay, it will be many more than two years before the memories fades.

Devitt, a resident of San Jose, Calif., suffered from the same emotional after shocks of Vietnam that have beset many other veterans. After his own experience of the Wall in Washington, D.C., he took on the mission of bringing as much of that experience as possible to those who would never be able to make the trip East.

At first, he and three colleagues tried in 1983 to photograph the Wall and make a giant photographic mural. When the negatives were enlarged, the names were illegible.

But by borrowing the negatives used in making photo-stencils for carving the Wall's granite, the members of what became Vietnam Combat Veterans Ltd. were able to put together a more enduring replica, with raised letters rather than incised names, but

with a coloration much like that of the original. Since then, Devitt has been relentlessly touring the country with one or another of the three Moving Walls that now exist, trying to reach as many veterans as possible.

The camaraderie, the brotherhood, the indescribable solidarity of those in combat is the background against which the meaning of the Moving Wall must be seen. "I find myself in the same position as General Schwarzkopf — I served with the finest people in the history of the world," Jacobsen said.

"There was a battlefield code of honor that was established," he continued. "Believe it or not, there are guys who would go back to have a taste of that again."

"Camaraderie is a word we throw around," Jacobsen said. "But believe me, in a battle zone there is no higher."

From that experience, veterans have lessons to teach the rest of society, and they can make tremendous contributions, Jacobsen

said. In his view, if the torch of solidarity is not passed from the veterans of one war to those of the next, an essential part of the standards that make up a country erodes away.

"Nobody can burn the flag inside me," Jacobsen said.

When it was realized how many traumas were left unresolved by putting combat veterans on the street only days after being in the jungle, new forms of counseling developed, Jacobsen said. The crisis intervention in schools after the space shuttle blew up, the debriefings of hostages, the care with which Persian Gulf troops were demobilized — "that all came out of Vietnam," he said.

In regard to the way combat experiences were handled after the Persian Gulf conflict, Jacobsen said "I'm proud I had a very small part in that. The buck stopped with me. From here on, it's done right."

The Vietnam veterans were almost derided or almost scorned by the American people at the

time of that war," said former Army nurse Maureen Dwyer, who served in the 67th Evacuation Hospital in Qui Nhon. "I feel they did some very heroic things."

"There was a level of responsibility and trust and brotherhood among Vietnam veterans that only they can understand, but the American people — at some point it would be nice for them to understand it, too, or at least be a little more aware of the dignity that these men share," Dwyer said.

If Rutland area veterans are getting better help, it's largely because of the efforts of the veterans themselves. Groups working with veterans, especially the Veterans Assistance Office on Center Street in Rutland (775-6772), have been preparing to re-establish brotherhood with those whose needs are brought out by seeing the names on the Moving Wall.

Before the Moving Wall was put up, several of those most involved with the memorial's appearance in the Gardner-Fitchburg area of Massachusetts drove up to Rutland to talk with officials at the Chaffee Art Center and make sure they understood all the consequences. Daniel Kelley, a co-organizer of that event, said "We had quite an experience with it."

"We had counselors there right on hand," Kelley said. But for the men who haven't dealt with their war experiences in 20 years and find themselves in turmoil, "they want to talk to another Vietnam veteran," he said.

"We had no knowledge of how intense it would be," Kelley said. "I talked to many people who were healed," he said — including non-veterans who made their peace not just by finding names on the Moving Wall but "by going up to Vietnam veteran and thanking him."

In Rutland, much of the pressure of veterans' issues comes to bear on the Veterans Assistance

The Moving Wall: in Main Street Park near the junction of Route 4 and Route 7 in Rutland, through Sept. 18. Closing ceremonies in the park at 6 p.m. September 18.

Exhibition at the Chaffee Art Center, 16 South Main Street (across from the Main Street Park), open daily 10-5 except Tuesday, through Sept. 15: artifacts of the Vietnam era, Chad Harter photographs of Vietnam in 1968-69, Michael Cousino dioramas of infantry life in Vietnam, Bonnie O'Hara photographs of Memorial Day in Washington, D.C. in 1988, and a video "The Long Way Home."

Panel discussions at the National Guard Armory on West Street (Route 4) in Rutland, moderator by Castleton State College Dean of Students and Vietnam veteran Robert Rummel:

Sept. 10, "The Vietnam Conflict: Historical Perspective," with Vaugh Artemus, Asst. Prof. at UVM; Robert Warren, Prof. of Sociology at Johnson State College.

Office, an independent organization set up for the benefit of all veterans, but headed now by Vietnam veteran Don Bodette. It was Bodette, together with Hartford lawyer Rusty Sachs, who started the nation's first chapter of the Vietnam Veterans of America in Rutland in 1979.

Sachs knew Bobby Muller, who was trying to start VVA on the national level, Bodette said. Bodette put out leaflets and held informal meetings in Rutland, and "by the third meeting I knew something was going to happen here," he said.

He and Sachs contacted Muller, whose response to starting a chapter was "You can't do that."

"Why not?" he was asked.

"We aren't ready for it," was the response.

"I said, 'That's your problem, you'd better get ready,'" Bodette said. "And that's how we became Chapter No. 1, because we were the first to get organized."

The Veterans Assistance Office began in 1982 when Bodette was a Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) volunteer, and began operating out of homes instead of

an office in 1986 when the VISTA funding dried up. The VAO was certified as a non-profit organization last December, and began operating an office again during the Persian Gulf war.

It's not that hard to start a program to help veterans with employment, or stress, or family life, etc., Bodette said, but without people like those in the Veterans Assistance Office (Bodette, Eugene Miner and Clark Howland, primarily) it may not be possible to help the individual.

"Jobs may be the important thing," Bodette said, but "does the person have transportation? What's his health? Does he have any problems at home?"

"There are so many things to look at," Bodette said. "We do

whatever we can."

Speaking of jobs: Sen. James Jeffords, a Vietnam-era veteran himself and a member of the Board of Advisers for the Vietnam Veterans of America, said he is the national chairman of a new program asking corporations to set aside jobs for veterans of all wars. He said he still feels bad about what happened to the Vietnam veterans when they pressed claims that Agent Orange had created serious health problems, claims he believes are at least partially justified.

But the big chemical companies stood to lose billions and the U.S. might have been sued by Vietnam and Laos. "All that stuff got involved with it. The corruption that went on in the studies — it's

just abominable. I'm one of those who screamed about it," Jeffords said.

Such are the issues that are likely to be revisited during the series of events surrounding the coming of the Moving Wall (see listing below). Robert Rummel, the Dean of Students at Castleton State College and a moderator for three panel discussions to be held in conjunction with the Moving Wall's arrival, said schools are being alerted to the potential for bringing a new generation up-to-date on that phase of American history.

The schools have received maps, chronologies, bibliographies and lists of speakers who might help classes understand why the arrival of the Moving Wall is being taken so seriously, Rummel said. Asked how much most college students know about Vietnam when they arrive from high school, he laughed ruefully.

"You know, when you were in high school and took history," Rummel said. Start with Columbus, get to World War II, maybe

Korea. History textbooks with a page and a half about Vietnam, a subject this society still is reluctant to examine.

"Most of the students who come to Castleton weren't even born by when I was in Vietnam," Rummel observed.

The hope is that the Moving Wall will be the catalyst for a kind of homecoming and peacemaking within the hearts and minds of veterans, between veterans and those who did not fight, between veterans of one war and another, and between generations. The history of the original wall suggests that the hopes are not unfounded.

Detractors of the design, especially Secretary of the Interior James Watt, derided the memorial as a grave-like gash in the earth, a monument to defeat rather than victory without any flags, guns, or even statues of people, designed by an Oriental (American artist Maya Lin).

There is now a flagpole at the site and a statue of three combat soldiers (black, Hispanic, white), but they are hardly noticed. What is now clear is that the stark simplicity of listing over 58,000 names allowed the heroism and sacrifices of the troops in Vietnam to speak for themselves, and that was the only thing necessary.

Sept. 11, "The Vietnam Conflict: Personal Perspectives," with Vietnam veterans Greg Barsanti, Stephan "Mark" Truhar, Jake Jacobsen, Maureen Dwyer, and Mary Trombley; Peace Corps volunteer Bill Anderson; war protester Peter Cosgrove (U.S. Army 1968-70), and conscientious objector Spencer Putnam.

Sept. 12: "The Legacies of the Vietnam Conflict," with Matthew J. Friedman, executive director of the National Center for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Jeff Danziger, political cartoonist; Peter Martin, executive vice-president of WCAX-TV; John Foster, retired Foreign Service officer.

Vermont ETV film "Dear America: Letters Home From Vietnam," at the National Guard armory, Sept. 16, 9-11:30 p.m.

Reading Discussion series at the Rutland Free Public Library, 7 p.m., books available at the library (773-1860).

The Moving Wall

Janet Muzzey
Layout Editor

It was emotional. It wasn't even the real thing but it still made my sentence fade off into the night. I wasn't born in the Vietnam era and yet still "The Moving Wall" has changed my outlook on what wartime means to the generations before me.

It wasn't just a wall with names on it. It was a black wall with white names listed in the order that they died in the Vietnam War. The years range from 1959 to 1975. The ends of the wall began with only one row of names and it climaxed in the middle to a list of names about 6' high. There are 58,200 names listed. They are a part of the history of the country that I was born to.

And there was a man from my hometown with the same last name as mine.

"The Moving Wall" is a 250' replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. It was made because the Vietnam Combat Veterans Ltd. from California realized that not everyone would be able to make it to the original memorial. The idea was made possible because of the contributions from the public. For many "The Moving Wall" has changed their lives.

"It's a way to release anger," Eugene Minor, a Vietnam Veteran, said. For him the wall has helped to release the chip that he carries around with him on his shoulder.

"The Moving Wall" was only one way the Chaffee Art Center chose to represent the Vietnam War to Rutland. Along with "The Moving Wall" presentation was also a display of the memorabilia from the Vietnam War, consisting of photographs by Chad Harter and Bonnie O'Hara, and folk art dioramas of Vietnam by Micheal Cousino.

The Chaffee Art Center also organized panel discussions concerning the historical and personal perspectives and legacies of the Vietnam conflict.

At the panel discussion on personal perspectives of the war, Jake Jacobsen, also a Vietnam Veteran, said that "The Moving Wall" is a "vehicle for healing. And a vehicle for understanding."

We are the future generation. If you missed the presentations the Chaffee Art Center presented to Rutland than I would like you to ask yourself this; How can you ever expect to understand our country if you don't listen or if you don't see what the older generation has to offer us?